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Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in the Central African Republic and on the activities of the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in that country

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to the request of the Security Council contained in the statement issued by its President on 26 September 2001 (S/PRST/2001/25), in which the Council requested me to continue to keep it regularly informed about the situation in the Central African Republic and about the activities of the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in that country (BONUCA).

2. The report provides an update on the political, socio-economic, security, humanitarian and human rights developments in the Central African Republic and on the activities of BONUCA since my last report, of 12 June 2009 (S/2009/309). The report also summarizes the efforts to put in place the structure and resources required for the operationalization of the future United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic (BINUCA).

II. Political situation

3. During the reporting period, the Central African Republic and its international partners continued to focus on efforts to implement the outcome of the inclusive political dialogue of December 2008, in particular, the aspects related to implementation of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme and preparations for the organization of elections in 2010.

4. The Dialogue Follow-up Committee, set up on 29 January 2009, has so far held five monthly plenary meetings and three quarterly meetings to review the progress made in the implementation of the recommendations of the inclusive political dialogue. At its third quarterly meeting, held in Bangui on 5 and 6 October, the Committee again regretted the slow pace of implementation of the recommendations of the dialogue. The Committee also deplored the non-implementation of key political recommendations relating to the separation of powers, the establishment of a permanent dialogue mechanism and ending the practice of Government officials holding multiple functions.

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5. To help promote national reconciliation, President François Bozizé appointed the former Archbishop of Bangui, Paulin Pomodimo, as the National Mediator, on 27 August, to replace the late Abel Nguende Goumba, who died on 11 May. Since his appointment, Mr. Pomodimo has held meetings with members of the political opposition and the Government in an effort to find peaceful solutions to the country's political problems. In another significant development, the Government of the Central African Republic dismissed Saifee Durbar, a controversial businessman who had been named Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs in January 2009. It may be recalled that Mr. Durbar had claimed diplomatic immunity in order to escape judicial prosecution in London and Paris.

III. Preparations for the organization of elections

6. On 3 August, President Bozizé promulgated into law the text of the electoral code which the Constitutional Court had ruled on 30 July as containing provisions that were anti-constitutional. On 27 August, the President signed a decree, based on the disputed electoral code, establishing the Independent Electoral Commission. Those actions provoked the political opposition, namely the Union des forces vives de la nation (UFVN) and "the other parties", to immediately suspend its participation in the Independent Electoral Commission and to request the Constitutional Court to annul the electoral code. The Constitutional Court, in a decision delivered on 26 September, requested the Government to respect the Court's judgement given on 30 July. Subsequently, President Bozizé agreed to remove the contentious provisions from the text of the electoral code and to promulgate a new electoral code on 2 October. On 3 October, the President signed a decree establishing the Independent Electoral Commission and, on 8 October, another decree appointing the 30 members of the Commission, drawn from the six groups that had participated in the inclusive political dialogue.

7. On 12 October, the Independent Electoral Commission elected Joseph Binguimale as its President. The members of the Commission were sworn in on 16 October. On 26 October, my Special Representative, Sahle-Work Zewde, met with Mr. Binguimale and the two vice-presidents of the Independent Electoral Commission to discuss the way forward for the Commission.

8. On 22 September, the National Assembly held an extraordinary session at which it adopted the supplementary budget for the remaining period of 2009. The budget includes a provision of 1 billion CFA francs (approximately US$ 2,296,000) for the funding of the elections. A similar amount was included in the 2010 budget. This was seen as an important step in the electoral process, as the opposition had earlier interpreted the non-inclusion of provisions for elections in the 2009 budget as a demonstration of the Government's lack of intention to hold the elections in 2010.

9. In response to a request from the Government of the Central African Republic, I dispatched an electoral needs assessment mission to Bangui from 29 October to 12 November 2009. The mission held discussions with relevant Government authorities, the main political actors in the Central African Republic, the Independent Electoral Commission, civil society entities, members of the international community in Bangui, and organizations of the United Nations system in the Central African Republic.

10. The needs assessment mission met with the Prime Minister, Faustin-Archange Touadera, at the beginning of its visit and was again received by the Prime Minister for a debriefing session at the end. The mission stressed that there was an urgent need to mobilize resources to operationalize the Independent Electoral Commission and to put in place the complex structures and operations needed for the conduct of credible elections. The mission found that the electoral process in the Central African Republic faces many constraints and risks, which can be mitigated only with substantial and expeditious assistance from the international community. Consequently, it recommended that the United Nations provide electoral assistance to the Central African Republic, centred on two strategic objectives: to contribute to the improvement of the social, political and security environment in the country, with a view to creating the conditions for the organization of peaceful and transparent elections; and to provide technical support for the preparation and conduct of legislative and presidential elections in 2010. On the basis of the recommendations of the needs assessment mission, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has prepared a project document containing the details of a United Nations electoral assistance package for the Central African Republic.

11. BONUCA/BINUCA will take the lead in supporting efforts to create an enabling environment for peaceful and credible elections, while UNDP will coordinate the provision of technical support. In that regard, I am pleased to report that, following the needs assessment mission, UNDP moved expeditiously to make available an amount of $365,000 to enable the Independent Electoral Commission to become immediately functional and operational. This contribution will also allow the rapid deployment of technical expertise to assist the Commission with preparations for the electoral census and voter registration. The European Union has also pledged €4 million to support the elections. Given the tight schedule, as elections must constitutionally be held before the end of April 2010, the progress in the preparations for the elections will need to be closely monitored and fully supported to keep the process on track.

12. Among potential candidates in the forthcoming polls, much attention has been given to the candidacy of former President Ange-Félix Patassé, who returned to Bangui on 30 October 2009 after six years in exile following his ouster by François Bozizé in the military events of March 2003. At a meeting with President Bozizé in Bangui on 9 November 2009, Mr. Patassé reaffirmed his intention of contesting the presidential elections. President Bozizé, for his part, has yet to formally announce his candidacy.

13. I remain concerned over reports of intimidation and restriction of the movements of some members of the political opposition by the security forces during the critical pre-election period. I therefore continue to urge the Government to ensure the security of all political actors to enable them to participate freely in the democratic process. I am also concerned by the call by some politicians in the country for a constitutional amendment or a political arrangement that would allow the elections to be postponed, reportedly because of insecurity in some parts of the country and also owing to the delay in the implementation of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme. The ongoing implementation of the disarmament and demobilization phases will begin to lower the level of mistrust between the Government and former rebels, thus contributing to a more secure environment in the country. At the same time, conditioning the holding of elections

on the full implementation of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme risks compromising the entire peacebuilding effort in the country.

IV. Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme

14. After initial delays, the first phase of the sensitization campaign prior to disarmament, demobilization and reintegration was formally launched by President Bozizé on 13 August, in the north-western town of Paoua, on the occasion of the celebration of the forty-ninth anniversary of the country's independence. The campaign, conducted from 26 August to 4 September, was led by the Senior Minister of Communication, Good Citizenship, National Reconciliation and Dialogue Monitoring, Cyriaque Gonda, along with the leader of a former rebel group, Armée populaire pour la restauration de la démocratie (APRD), Jean Jacques Demafouth, and a representative of another former rebel movement, the Union des forces démocratiques pour le rassemblement (UFDR), Achimine Soulaymane. The BONUCA military adviser also accompanied the sensitization team to various locations, including the Ouham, Ouham Pende, Nana-Grebizi and Vakaga prefectures, where meetings were held with rebel fighters of APRD and UFDR. The opportunity was also used to promote reconciliation between former rebels and local Government officials in former rebel-occupied territories, leading to the removal of illegal roadblocks that had been put in place by rebel groups.

15. Meanwhile, the Steering Committee on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration has continued to make progress in the preparations for the full implementation of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme. On 17 September, the Technical Committee revised the calendar and the budget for the programme, which is now estimated at approximately $27 million. A support team of the UNDP Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery visited Bangui from 24 September to 1 October to finalize the methodology for the verification of the lists of ex-combatants, as well as to finalize the document guiding the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process. All former rebel groups had submitted the lists of their combatants by April 2009, except for one former rebel group, the Mouvement des libérateurs centrafricains pour la justice (MLCJ), which has yet to submit its list. Nevertheless, about 8,000 ex-combatants are now expected to be demobilized, and the recruitment of specialists for the implementation of the programme has been completed.

16. In the meantime, the Government of the Central African Republic has spent 65 million CFA francs (about $130,000) to rehabilitate the building put at the disposal of the Steering Committee for the implementation of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme. On 14 October, President Bozizé met with the members of the Committee and underlined the critical importance of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process for peace and stability in the Central African Republic. Furthermore, a workshop on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration was organized from 2 to 5 November to discuss the United Nations Integrated Standards for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration with the stakeholders, including the Government, former rebel groups and leaders, technical and financial partners, the Mission for the Consolidation of Peace in the Central African Republic (MICOPAX), BONUCA and United Nations agencies.

17. While the full implementation of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme is a long-term goal, there is a need to expedite the design and implementation of the disarmament and demobilization components of the programme in order to create the minimum security conditions needed for the conduct of peaceful and transparent elections in April 2010. Some reports indicate that a growing number of former combatants are becoming increasingly impatient with the delay in the implementation of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. I welcome the signing on 5 November of a memorandum of understanding between the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the Steering Committee on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration, which clears the way for the deployment of 31 military observers from ECCAS to support the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process. I am also thankful to the European Union for undertaking to fund the deployment.

V. Military and security situation

18. Most of the rebel groups which are signatories to the Libreville Comprehensive Peace Agreement are now participating in the peace process in the Central African Republic. The only rebel group that remains outside the peace process is the Convention des patriotes pour la justice et la paix (CPJP), led by Charles Massi, a former Government Minister. The Government has initiated dialogue with the military leadership of CPJP, with a view to persuading the group to join the peace process. Similarly, following the signing of a peace agreement with the leader of the Front démocratique pour le peuple centrafricain (FDPC), Abdoulaye Miskine, on the sidelines of the African Union Summit held in July at Sirte, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, about 21 former FDPC fighters returned to Bangui to join the peace process. However, since returning to Bangui some rebel groups have been facing internal crises, and some senior members of MLCJ have formed a new movement, the Mouvement national du salut de la patrie (MNSP), led by Hassan Usman. Likewise, elements of FDPC, led by Gazzam Betty, have broken away from the FDPC leader, Abdoulaye Miskine. This split was reportedly provoked by Mr. Miskine's declaration, on 2 October, that he was withdrawing from both the Libreville Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the Sirte Agreement signed with the Government of the Central African Republic on 3 July, because, according to him, the Government had failed to respect the terms of those agreements. Mr. Miskine's announcement that he intends to withdraw from the peace process is a source of serious concern, deepened by the fact that he has so far not agreed to return to the Central African Republic.

19. The political and security situation in the Vakaga region, near the borders with Chad and the Sudan, is calm, but unpredictable, in the wake of recurrent inter-ethnic conflict between the Kara and Goula in the town of Birao. Tension has also been growing between the Kara and Haoussa ethnic groups. In October, some businessmen were killed by unknown Kara militants, leading to renewed tension in the town of Birao and the closure of the market for three days. On 21 November, two staff members of an international non-governmental organization, Triangle Génération Humanitaire, were kidnapped in Birao by unknown armed individuals, resulting in the temporary suspension of the activities of the International Committee of the Red Cross in the region. Other humanitarian organizations have expressed concern about the security situation.

20. Following the ethnic violence in Birao in June, the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT) provided air transport to facilitate a joint BONUCA/Government visit to mediate between the Kara ethnic group and the Goula-dominated UFDR movement in Birao, from 1 to 4 July. That effort led to the departure of the Goula-dominated UFDR from Birao to their base in Tiringoulou. My Special Representative subsequently undertook a visit to Birao, on 1 October, during which she held discussions with the representatives of the different ethnic groups, the new prefect of Birao, the regional commander of the Central African Armed Forces, and the MINURCAT contingent based in Birao, to identify strategies for a political solution to the recurring inter-ethnic crises in the region. During the visit, it was noted that, whereas a number of people had fled Birao to neighbouring towns in the Central African Republic in June, some had started to return to the town, as life was returning to normal.

21. The presence in the APRD strongholds around Kaga Bandoro of elements loyal to a Chadian dissident leader, General Baba Laddé, is also a source of security concern. The General, who had always claimed that he was on a crusade against road bandits commonly known as "Zaraguinas", was declared persona non grata by the Government of the Central African Republic in October and was subsequently arrested and deported to Chad following clashes between his Front populaire pour le redressment (FPR) and Chadian forces in the northern border town of Sido on 3 October 2009. Supporters of General Baba Laddé have threatened to wage a jihad against the Central African Republic Government and the subregional peacekeeping force, MICOPAX, in retaliation. They have accused MICOPAX of facilitating the arrest of the FPR leader.

22. The security and humanitarian situation in the Haut Mbomou region in the south-eastern Central African Republic also worsened during the period under review as the result of the arrival in the area of fighters belonging to the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), originally from Uganda. Reports indicate that LRA has been using the south-eastern tip of the Central African Republic as a corridor to move to southern Sudan, where it reportedly has its rear bases. Joint operations involving the Ugandan People's Defence Forces (UPFD) and the Central African Armed Forces have recently been launched to combat LRA activities in the area. After the arrival of 200 UPDF soldiers in Obo on 5 July, several LRA elements were killed and a senior LRA commander, Okot, was killed in August. However, throughout the month of July, LRA elements attacked various locations in the Central African Republic, including Mboki, Ligoua, Obo, Maboussou and other neighbouring villages, targeting markets and food warehouses operated by international relief agencies. On 14 July, LRA looted stocks of rice, groundnuts and cassava flour in Dindiri, about 3 kilometres from Obo. On 24 July, the town of Ligoua was liberated from Lord's Resistance Army control following a military operation conducted by UPDF. On 2 August, LRA conducted a reprisal attack against the town of Mboki. On 12 August, UPDF aircraft bombed suspected LRA locations and some senior members of LRA were reportedly wounded as a result of the attack. LRA is said to have operated in small groups, striking at different locations at the same time. On 21 August, LRA attacked a lorry hired by an international non-governmental organization, Cooperazione Internazionale, near Mboki, leaving two staff members dead and two others wounded.

23. The absence of effective State authority throughout the national territory, especially along the borders with Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and

the Sudan, remains a source of concern, as reports of incursions into the south-eastern region of the Central African Republic have persisted.

24. As part of the strategy to enhance the operational capacity of the Armed Forces, a round table on security sector reform was organized in Bangui on 29 October to define strategies for addressing the security challenges in the country. The meeting did not, however, yield any concrete pledges in support of the security sector reform process. Given that security sector reform is critical for sustainable peace and security, as well as for the overall stabilization of the country, I appeal to the international community to generously support the implementation of the security sector reform projects in the Central African Republic. Meanwhile, BONUCA and the United Nations country team continue to provide support to enhance the operational capacities of the Central African Republic police and gendarmes and to organize training for the defence and security forces on respect of international humanitarian and human rights law and the rights of women and children.

VI. Gender issues

25. During the period under review, BONUCA continued to promote women's rights and women's participation in the country's political life, in compliance with Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008) concerning women and peace and security. Thus, in August, as part of the celebration of the 47th Pan-African Women's Day in Bangui, BONUCA assisted the Ministry of Social Affairs, National Solidarity and the Family in organizing various awareness-raising events.

26. In September, BONUCA helped the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization to strengthen the capacity of subprefects and prefects to deal with human rights and gender issues. In October, BONUCA supported the Women's Forum of the National Standing Committee for Monitoring the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region in organizing a one-day workshop to reflect on concrete actions to increase women's participation in the upcoming elections in the Central African Republic. Following that workshop, BONUCA assisted the Platform G-23 group on women's political participation to prepare and launch advocacy campaigns for women within their respective political parties, with a view to fostering women's participation in the elections. More than 500 women have participated in those campaigns to date.

VII. Socio-economic situation

27. Economic activity in the Central African Republic declined in 2009, owing to both domestic and external factors, including the adverse impact of the current global economic crisis on the export sector. Gross domestic product (GDP) was forecast to grow by an average 2 per cent in 2009, compared with the 2.2 per cent registered in 2008 and the estimated average growth rate of 2.4 per cent that had been projected in the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility programme of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 2009. The volume of timber and diamond exports dropped by 38 and 27 per cent respectively in the period from August 2008 to July 2009. This situation led to the closure of a number of companies, the loss of

direct and indirect jobs, as well as a significant fall in household revenue, particularly in the affected production zones.

28. The Central African Republic authorities have introduced significant measures to boost domestic revenue collection and to improve the management of public expenditure, resulting in an estimated reduction of 12 billion CFA francs (approximately $27,551,000) in domestic debt. Debt owed to commercial banks is being renegotiated through the consolidation of old loans into a new single loan, with more favourable conditions. However, delays in payments to civil servants remain a serious problem, with the Government reporting two months of salary arrears.

29. The Government of the Central African Republic has pursued, with the support of the World Bank, its programme of civil service reform and fight against corruption. A number of institutions, including seven Government ministries and departments (Health, Education, Agriculture, the Civil Service, Territorial Administration, the General Secretariat of the Government and Foreign Affairs) have been audited and a law requiring senior civil servants and heads of public companies to declare their assets has been promulgated. Furthermore, the introduction of the "single window", with the support of UNDP, to facilitate formalities for the creation of business enterprises, contributed to reducing the time required for the processing of requests from nine months to seven days, and to creating a more business-friendly environment.

30. Those reforms and the improved overall performance enabled the Central African Republic to attain the completion point under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative in July, thus paving the way for the country to benefit from debt alleviation by multilateral institutions. The debt reduction granted by multilateral creditors under the HIPC initiative stood at $578 million, including $207 million from the World Bank and $26.77 million from IMF. The total debt owed by the Central African Republic to Paris Club creditors has declined from $59.3 million to $3.7 million in 2009.

31. Although the Central African Republic will continue in 2010 to experience the effects of the global economic slowdown, its economic growth is expected to experience an upturn and reach a 3.5 per cent average growth rate, while the average inflation rate is expected to be contained at around 3 per cent. The external current account deficit is also expected to decrease owing to expected higher flows of external aid and improvements in the export sector. Moreover, the Government of the Central African Republic has pledged to pursue, in 2010, reforms contained in the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility programme, which will end in June 2010.

VIII. Humanitarian situation

32. As of October 2009, the overall number of internally displaced persons was estimated at 162,000. The Central African Republic is also host to some 3,700 Sudanese refugees who have fled Darfur in successive waves since May 2007. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other implementing partners have provided protection and assistance to those refugees, while searching for more durable solutions.

33. Early in July, WFP, UNHCR, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and other partners conducted a cross-border operation, bringing 250 tons of food to Chad in order to assist 18,000 Central African refugees who fled the country following local conflicts in the Bamingui Bangoran prefecture of the Central African Republic. In Sam-Ouandja, Haute Kotto prefecture, WFP supplied rations to 15,000 displaced persons. The activities of LRA in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in the south-eastern prefecture of Haut Mbomou in the Central African Republic have caused refugee movements from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and internal displacement in Haut Mbomou. An estimated 9,783 people (3,783 refugees and 6,000 internally displaced persons) have benefited from the humanitarian assistance of the United Nations and non-governmental organizations, including a field evaluation of the water, hygiene and sanitation situations in order to rehabilitate water points and latrines.

34. UNICEF, in partnership with non-governmental organizations, provided non-food items to an estimated 6,000 to 8,000 displaced persons in the Kabo-Ouandango-Batangafo triangle, who had fled their homes because of attacks in mid-April. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) provided emergency reproductive health kits and other medical equipment to four prefectures (Vakaga, Ouham, Ouham-Pende and Haut Mbomou) affected by post-conflict and humanitarian crises, and strengthened the capacities of local health facilities to provide rapid and adequate care in obstetric emergencies under the framework of accelerated reduction of maternal and neonatal mortality in populations affected by conflict.

35. UNHCR organized five workshops for Government representatives, to assess the progress made by the Central African Republic in the implementation of the Great Lakes Protocol on the Protection of and Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons and the challenges facing the Government of the Central African Republic in implementing its commitment to respect human rights. In July, President Bozizé signed a presidential order creating the Permanent National Consultative and Coordination Committee for the Protection of the Rights of Internally Displaced Persons.

36. During the reporting period, UNHCR continued to organize training sessions to promote awareness of the applicable Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. Those activities targeted Government officials, the national security forces and MICOPAX. In July, the UNHCR field office in Paoua organized a training session for members of the APRD rebel group, the local police and gendarmes, Government troops and MICOPAX. In September and October, two sessions of training targeting 82 female former fighters belonging to APRD were organized. UNHCR field officers also sensitized APRD women soldiers on HIV/AIDS. In addition, UNHCR facilitated a two-day workshop for prosecutors in the Central African Republic to develop strategies to end violence against individuals accused of witchcraft.

37. UNFPA, for its part, provided support to the Military Committee to Fight against AIDS through the training of military health workers on health care and assistance to victims of sexual violence, and sensitization on HIV/AIDS and gender-based violence for military personnel and people living around military camps.

38. In the domain of child protection, UNICEF, in cooperation with its partners, has demobilized 425 children (374 boys and 51 girls) associated with armed groups in the north-west of the country. To ensure that the children are smoothly reintegrated into their communities, UNICEF has supported the construction of a

well in the host community of Paoua, where the UNICEF orientation centre is located. The well is designed to benefit approximately 200 households, or about 1,000 people. UNICEF continued to support six therapeutic feeding units and 26 outpatient therapeutic programmes in the northern part of the Central African Republic, treating an average of 1,100 severely malnourished children per month. Following an increase of malnutrition cases in the south-west of the country, four additional therapeutic feeding units and nine outpatient therapeutic feeding programmes were opened, treating an average of 900 severely malnourished children per month. It is estimated that about 27,000 children die of malnutrition every year in the Central African Republic.

39. In the area of food security and nutrition, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is implementing the Integrated Phase Classification to collect and classify data on food insecurity, in order to identify priorities for intervention. Overall, WFP assisted 348,000 vulnerable people with 8,200 tons of food. Through a relief component, WFP provided assistance to vulnerable internally displaced persons as well as malnourished children, mothers of malnourished children and pregnant and nursing women. Additionally, 3,000 Darfurian refugees and crisis-affected people are supported through general food distributions, and 85,000 children in the bush receive assistance through emergency school meals.

40. In response to the floods in Bangui in July, food, non-food items and medical products were provided by the United Nations system to some 10,000 people. In addition, WFP continued to facilitate the movement of personnel and goods of the humanitarian community in the Central African Republic through its United Nations Humanitarian Air Service, as well as through its logistical support, which includes storage and transportation capacity.

41. The urban refugee and asylum-seeker population consisted of 5,319 persons from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Chad, the Sudan, Burundi and Rwanda. Following the completion of voluntary repatriations, UNHCR is now focusing on facilitating local integration and resettlement in a third country and helping urban refugees to develop income-generating activities.

IX. Operational activities in support of recovery and development

42. During the reporting period, United Nations programmes, funds and agencies pursued their activities within the United Nations Development Assistance Framework, whose priorities, in support of the national poverty reduction strategy, are focused on (i) promotion of good governance and respect for human rights, (ii) post-conflict recovery and the fight against poverty and (iii) the fight against HIV/AIDS.

43. In the area of governance and crisis prevention, UNDP, in concert with the European Commission, BONUCA and the Government of France, continued to provide security sector reform assistance through the technical secretariat of the Security Sector Reform Steering Committee. In its capacity as executing organ for the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme, UNDP has begun the gradual recruitment of operational staff and procurement of equipment and

infrastructure for the programme. Within the framework of its project for the strengthening of the rule of law, and in partnership with other programmes, UNDP also continued to provide capacity-building and institutional strengthening support to judicial and security institutions. In addition, UNDP commissioned a socio-economic study to assist the Government to determine the reintegration needs of combatants slated to enter the programme after verification. UNDP also sought to ensure that the socio-economic study was in line with Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), to guarantee a gender-responsive approach, especially since some of the former combatants slated for the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process are women.

44. The health sector continues to pose serious challenges. Fourteen cases of the wild poliovirus have been detected in the Paoua subprefecture since the poliomyelitis epidemic broke out at the beginning of the year. Polio immunization campaigns were organized by UNICEF and the World Health Organization, with the goal of vaccinating, by the end of the year, 800,000 children under the age of 5. Moreover, UNICEF, in collaboration with its partners, distributed 17,032 mosquito nets to a total of 8,516 households and is expecting the delivery of 1,100,000 additional long-lasting insecticide-treated nets.

45. In the area of education, UNICEF organized sensitization sessions throughout the 16 prefectures of the Central African Republic to promote girls' education and early childhood development through preschooling. UNICEF also pursued its capacity-building activities aimed at school directors and teachers and organized training sessions on education in emergencies. In the Sam Ouandja and Haute Kotto prefectures, 1,760 students were finally able to study in improved conditions thanks to the construction of latrines, the equipping of classrooms with tables and benches and the distribution of school kits. UNICEF also worked with partners to construct six new schools for the 2009/10 school year in the Bamingui Bangoran, Nana-Gribizi and Ouham prefectures.

X. Human rights and rule of law

46. The human rights situation in the Central African Republic remains worrisome owing to the security context, especially in the prefectures of Haut Mboumou and Vakaga and in parts of the northern and north-western regions of the country. LRA elements were held responsible for several cases of human rights and international humanitarian law violations, including summary executions, abductions, rape and the systematic pillaging of towns and villages in the Haut Mboumou area. Staff of the BONUCA Human Rights Section visited refugee camps for internally displaced persons in the area and noted that inmates often lacked protection, despite the presence of the Ugandan forces and the Central African Armed Forces. On the basis of that assessment, BONUCA recommended renewed efforts to ensure the security and protection of civilian populations, in particular refugees and internally displaced persons, as well as other vulnerable groups and communities; strengthening of the rule of law and the capacity of security agencies in the area, particularly in the towns of Obo and Mboki; the implementation of the protection mandate of the Armed Forces and the police; and better coordination of humanitarian efforts for refugees and internally displaced persons, particularly with regard to meeting their needs for food, water, health care and shelter.

47. Impunity remained a major source of concern all over the country during the reporting period. Security agents manning legal roadblocks continued to indulge in acts of racketeering and extortion against the local population, especially in Ouham and Ouham Pende prefectures. Several cases of arbitrary arrest and detention were reported to the BONUCA Human Rights Section.

48. BONUCA has also supported activities geared towards promoting and protecting vulnerable groups, particularly women, children and the physically challenged. To that end, BONUCA supported the Ministry of Social Affairs in drafting and adopting the relevant legislation for the protection of the physically challenged in the Central African Republic.

49. With regard to the administration of justice, on 30 September the National Assembly adopted the revised penal code and code of criminal procedure. The revised penal code includes new provisions enabling the Central African Republic to align its laws with international standards and norms. The reforms reflected in the new code of criminal procedure focused, inter alia, on the harmonization of domestic penal laws with universally recognized principles governing the rights of the accused, taking into account specific procedures provided for in international conventions ratified by the Central African Republic. In addition, on 8 August 2009 the Government promulgated an act amending and completing certain provisions of the act of 10 March 1997 on the organization and functions of the Supreme Court.

50. As part of the capacity-building activities of BONUCA in support of security institutions, its Human Rights Section organized training sessions for about 300 MICOPAX military personnel, over 30 officials of the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization and officials from 30 local authorities, to promote better understanding of and respect for human rights.

XI. Relations of BONUCA with MINURCAT

51. BONUCA continued to host a MINURCAT liaison officer at the BONUCA premises in Bangui. On 8 October, BONUCA and MINURCAT organized a mission to Birao comprising the ambassadors to the Central African Republic of China, France, the Netherlands, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America, and the representative of the European Union in Bangui. The goal of the mission was to assess the security and political situation on the ground. On 20 October, my Special Representative visited N'Djamena to participate in regular consultations with MINURCAT officials and, specifically, to discuss ways in which the collaboration between the two missions could be reinforced.

XII. Activities of the Peacebuilding Commission

52. On 22 June 2009, the Chairperson of the Central African Republic configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, the Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations, Jan Grauls, briefed the Security Council on the work of the Peacebuilding Commission. He stressed the need to accelerate the start of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process in the country, as an integral part of the security sector reform process. He also welcomed the decision of the

Council to establish an integrated United Nations presence in the Central African Republic.

53. On 27 and 28 August, the Chairperson of the Peacebuilding Commission undertook a mission to the Central African Republic to follow up with the national authorities and members of the international community in Bangui, including the United Nations system, on a number of pressing issues in the country's peacebuilding process, including disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and security sector reform, preparations for the 2010 general elections, and progress in the development hubs project. Regarding the development hubs project, the Chairperson noted that preparations were ongoing, but that communities, particularly those that had suffered the most from the violence of the past, were growing increasingly concerned at the slow pace of implementation of that project. He also expressed concern that only about one quarter of the total estimated budget for the peacebuilding projects had been mobilized at the time of his mission. Finally, he urged the Government to indicate the nature and extent of the technical and financial support it expected from the international community in support of peacebuilding efforts.

XIII. Activities of the Peacebuilding Fund

54. Twelve projects have been approved for funding by the national Peacebuilding Fund Steering Committee, co-chaired by my Special Representative and a representative of the Government of the Central African Republic, from the initial $10 million allocation from the Peacebuilding Fund. Those projects focus on three main areas, identified in the Peacebuilding Fund priority plan: (i) security sector reform, including a separate allotment for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration; (ii) rule of law and good governance; (iii) communities affected by conflict.

55. Major results have been achieved in the implementation of a UNICEF project addressing the issue of children in the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process. The empowerment of women is being advanced through human rights training and income-generating activities. A seminar was organized on the cultural heritage of the Central African Republic, as a means of fostering national reconciliation and the peaceful resolution of conflict. Media programmes on the promotion of peace are being prepared, reaching out to the war-affected communities of Paoua and Birao through the community radio stations project implemented by UNESCO and the Ministry of Communications.

56. Despite the progress made in the implementation of some of the Peacebuilding Fund projects, the following challenges have been identified: (i) generalized difficulties in the start-up phase of projects; (ii) ongoing insecurity in the field; (iii) the poor state of the country's infrastructure, notably the road conditions in the interior of the country; and (iv) difficulties in communication with remote localities. The implementation of Peacebuilding Fund projects in the field has further highlighted the high expectations of peace dividends among the population. A retreat was organized in Bangui for the Steering Committee of the Peacebuilding Fund on 16 October to review the implementation of approved projects and to guide the finalization of the priority plan, which will allow the second allocation from the Fund to be released.

XIV. Transition to BINUCA

57. During the period under review, the Departments of Political Affairs and Field Support took actions to ensure the effective transition from BONUCA to BINUCA as from 1 January 2010. The proposed budget for BINUCA for 2010 has been reviewed by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and is currently with the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly for consideration.

XV. Observations

58. As this will be my last report before BONUCA is replaced by BINUCA, it is important to mention that the peacebuilding process in the Central African Republic has come a long way since BONUCA became operational in February 2000.

59. The Office played a critical facilitation role, which led to the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Libreville, in 2008, and the holding of the inclusive political dialogue in Bangui in December 2008. I expect that the establishment of BINUCA will greatly boost the impact of the work of the United Nations in the Central African Republic and lead to better coordination of the activities of the various United Nations presences in the country, so that the Organization can speak with one voice and follow a coherent approach in addressing the complex challenges facing the Central African Republic.

60. The establishment of the Independent Electoral Commission is an important step towards the organization of elections in 2010. I call on the international community to provide strong support to the Commission and the electoral process in the Central African Republic, as the conduct of peaceful and credible elections is critical to maintaining the momentum of the inclusive political dialogue, enshrining a stable democracy in the country and promoting lasting peace and development. Given the enormous technical challenges and the limited time frame allowed by the country's Constitution, it is imperative that preparations for the elections be monitored closely and that they are effectively supported, in order to ensure a fair and credible electoral process, to help the country break, finally, the cycle of conflicts that has retarded its socio-economic development since its independence nearly 50 years ago.

61. I urge the Government to ensure free movement and security for all actors, including, in particular, those belonging to opposition parties, to allow them to carry out their electoral campaigns throughout the country without intimidation or harassment. In addition, there is an urgent need to address the question of impunity and abuse of human rights perpetrated by both rebel fighters and Government security officers. At the same time, I acknowledge efforts being made by the Government of the Central African Republic, with the support from BONUCA and the United Nations country team, to promote respect of human rights and to bring perpetrators of human rights abuses to justice. I also welcome the effort to demobilize children fighting with rebel groups and other armed groups.

62. I also urge presidential candidates and their supporters to put national interest above narrow political or personal gain and to show, in words and deeds, a high level of civic responsibility and respect for the rights of their fellow citizens, so as to contribute to a peaceful environment before, during and after the elections.

63. The expeditious implementation of the disarmament and demobilization phases is critical for the conduct of elections in 2010. Any further delay in starting the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme may not only negatively affect the holding of elections as scheduled, but could also lead to the frustration of the ex-combatants waiting for disarmament, who may be forced to return to violence. Efforts must also be made to disarm the other armed groups, including the self-defence groups, the Kara, Goula and Rounga ethnic militias, who are not covered by the current disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme.

64. To address the question of cross-border insecurity in the longer term, the United Nations will continue to cooperate with the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC) to provide support for the tripartite process initiated by the Central African Republic, Cameroon and Chad since 2005 to carry out joint operations to combat cross-border insecurity along their common borders. Furthermore, BONUCA, the United Nations Mission in the Sudan, the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur and MINURCAT will also continue their efforts to enhance cooperation with one another, particularly with respect to information-sharing on negative security developments in the region. In that connection, I commend and support the regional effort to address the LRA menace.

65. I would also like to express deep appreciation for the constructive assistance of members of the international community in support of the consolidation of peace in the Central African Republic. I reiterate, in particular, my appreciation for the multisectoral contribution of the regional partners, including CEMAC, ECCAS and the African Union, which, despite their own limited resources, have generously made available financial assistance and peacekeeping forces as well as crucial mediation capacity to assist the Central African Republic regain and consolidate peace and security.

66. I commend the Central African Government for its management of the economy leading to attainment of completion point under the HIPC initiative, which has led to the cancellation of more than $506 million of external debts. I encourage the Government to use the opportunity of the debt relief to invest in critical sectors of the economy in order to stimulate economic growth and create employment.

67. Finally, I would like to conclude by commending the staff of BONUCA, under the leadership of my Special Representative, Sahle-Work Zewde, as well as the entire United Nations country team, for the important work they have done so far and which they will continue to carry out in the Central African Republic under BINUCA.